

S-E-C-R-E-T

Attachment to
SR Division Notice No. 376

Book Dispatch #1111
Dated 3 March 1959

SUBJECT: The Need for Careful Review of Audio-Surveillance Operations

1. The Problem. Our audio-surveillance operations cost us a lot of money annually. In addition we put in an even costlier investment of staff-officer time, in the field and at headquarters, in order to keep the operations going and to process the take. It is therefore necessary to examine carefully each one of our audio-surveillance operations, both in the field and at headquarters, in order to reach the right decision as to whether it should be continued, expanded, modified, reduced, or terminated.
2. Difficulty of Evaluating. Some of our audio-surveillance operations are of outstanding value, and a few of these are among our least expensive and burdensome. But they are the exceptions; in many cases it is very difficult to make a routine appraisal of the operation, for many reasons. The product is usually a combination of positive and operational information; the operational information is extremely fragmentary and varied, and its value is usually cumulative so that its current worth cannot be gauged. When leads are obtained and followed up, the contribution of audio-surveillance is part of a larger investigative effort and its relative value is difficult to determine. The take from large operations is distributed to the target area desks and it is difficult for the host-area desk and even more so for the station to keep themselves currently informed of the value of each portion of the operation; and when the operation is run jointly with a liaison service, the difficulty of evaluating is further compounded.
3. Project-Renewal Requests. Nevertheless we must make the best evaluation we can of our audio-surveillance operations; if we do not, we are sure to squander our efforts. In many project-renewal requests the whole problem is dispatched with some such formula as: "This activity is valuable because it provides a large quantity of CE and other operational information and is necessary for station operations". There is usually some positive intelligence information also but the Requirements Division is forced to give the project a "D" or "E" rating, with the comment that the project's primary purpose is not the production of disseminable information and that therefore it should be judged on other grounds. The renewal request contains much interesting information on the development of the project, the targets, the operating staff, cover, technical and operational problems, the method of transcription and translation, plans for expansion, and so on; we know in detail what we are doing for the project, but the big question that remains unanswered is: "What is the project doing for us?"
4. Examples of Take. A valid answer to this question will require the best judgment and sense of values of both the field and the headquarters case officers; it cannot be provided solely by a statistical account of the number of lines or mikes, of pages of take, of disseminated reports, and by the customary general statement on the value of the operational information. The field case officer must cite illustrative instances, as only he can, of the various ways in which information obtained from his technical operation has contributed to other station operations. Has anyone in the target installation been identified as an intelligence officer? Have any local residents been identified as clandestine contacts of target occupants? What significant biographic or personality information was obtained on persons of major operational interest to the station? Did the operation produce a lead towards the value or feasibility of an entry operation? Did some bit of conversation supply the answer to a double-agent problem? Did the monitoring of a target person show up his particular vulnerability to recruitment? How has this operational information been of use? Specific answers to such questions as these help in the difficult but essential task of forming a qualitative judgment on the operation and they are an indispensable supplement to the data on volume of production.

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5. Role of the Operation. It has been said over and over again that an audio-surveillance operation is of limited value unless it is used in conjunction with other station resources so that the isolated items of information coming through different means can complement, correct, or confirm each other and thus become serviceable. In order to place this audio-surveillance operation in the proper setting and do it justice, the case officer must describe briefly and specifically those other station sources of information which interest him. Are there agents who are in a position to report on the same targets? Does the station have active foot surveillance available? Is there any other information available both with which it can compare and which can be used to confirm or otherwise investigate? Is reliable information quickly obtainable from liaison on demand? Does the station have regular sources of travel information in the immigration service, the police, the travel agencies? Here again the value of the audio-surveillance operation is best shown by examples of significant contributions it made to certain operations in conjunction with other station facilities.

6. Station Planning. Finally, the picture of the operation should be completed with a statement of the case officer's planning. This statement must not express an unexplained desire for expansion. If expansion is planned, the proposal must be consistent with the operation's past history of progress, the importance of the new targets must be stated, and the extent to which the station can absorb the additional burden must be defined. On the other hand, if the quality and quantity of the operation's production should suggest modification, reduction, or termination, the case officer should so recommend.

7. Summing up. This paper should not give the impression that requests for the renewal of audio-surveillance projects should be longer than they generally have been in the past. It is meant to suggest rather that the case officer should give a more balanced picture; in addition to a succinct presentation of the basic facts, he should give a good selection of significant examples of how the stake has been of value, a similarly suggestive picture of the operation's role in the station work, and a statement of plans for the operation's future with the reasoning behind those plans. We need the most candid pictures we can get of all our audio-surveillance operations in order to make comparisons and if possible to arrive at criteria which would indicate what we are entitled to expect from a worthwhile audio-surveillance operation. The reluctance of stations to terminate or even to trim marginally useful audio-surveillance operations is understandable; there they are, like Old Faithful, gushing away day after day, month after month, year after year. No "production" is more "assured"—but is it worth the effort? The time of our case officers is too valuable to be spent in any way but the most useful.